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Writing in the Disciplines

Research Essay Final Draft

**Should Beauty Be Censored?**

In today’s society, there have been several discrepancies concerning whether or not certain pieces should be categorized as art. From famous paintings such as the Mona Lisa to the anonymous street artists who vandalize storefronts with graffiti, society does not know how to define artists’ forms of expressing themselves. Artists have been portrayed in the media as eccentric and quirky individuals who dance to their own rhythm, and society has accepted this perception of them. Although artists’ sense of nonconformity has become appreciated socially, all of their work has not been embraced. Not all artists’ submissions to galleries have been defined as “art”. Is beauty truly in the eye of the beholder?

First, let’s examine the mindset of the people creating the work. Artists tend to think outside of the box. Society makes this statement whenever they illustrate them in the media. In response to the stereotypes in the art industry, Pace University Art Professor, Kathryn Marohn, stated, “Some people …feel artists are people that function outside of society and look down on artists because they feel they are nonconformists. Though this is a stereotype, many people feel it is accurate.” Non-conformity to society’s definition on what’s “normal” could be the main factor behind negative views on certain works of art. “There has always been romanticism about the struggling artist and this myth has probably drawn people to art as much as it has driven them away.” (Marohn, 2012) Because artists see the world from a different perspective, does this mean their work should be disregarded because it doesn’t conform to what people are used to? There was a time in history where artists’ work was not considered beautiful or acceptable because it did not conform to what society was used to.

The French Royal Academy was established in the 1600s. Both experienced artists and amateurs brought in their work in hopes to have it displayed at the Salon. However, not all painting and sculpture submissions were accepted by the critics. In fact, the Salon did not accept the Impressionist Movement Artists. Claude Monet along with Renoir and Manet created their own independent art exhibitions after their art was denied. The critics felt that their technique wasn’t strong and found the abstract work as a sign of flaws in their work. Ironically, the same frowned upon paintings are today’s most globally known. In this millennium, what is considered to be some of the best art, is abstract like the artwork of the Impressionists – which proves opinions on art can change over time. (Mauclair)

In the article, “It Isn’t Pretty . . . But Is It Art?”, writer, Diana Mack speaks about the discrepancies in our own era regarding artwork displayed. Some work has been deemed, inappropriate for public viewing. Parents of young children who stepped foot in front of the statue felt it was mature for younger viewers. Mack mentioned “the heavily bosomed and pregnant *Picardo Venus,”* which was placed in a Seattle community garden. The public found the piece “too suggestive.” However, in the 1700s at the French Salon, practically any painting or sculpture of a nude woman that held the title, *Venus*, was accepted as a historical piece. Any painting or sculpture that embodied a historical, religious, or mythical figure, was deemed acceptable at almost all the Salon exhibitions. (Mack)

Feminists could argue that men were sexist during that time period. They might even argue that women should have the freedom to dress anyway they chose to – whether it’s an actual female or a portrayal of a woman in a piece of art. Other feminists might also take the stance that it is offensive for women to be put on display as sex objects and not depicted with more dignity and respect. This thought provoking topic was raised about a picture created by Chris Oflili of the *Holy Virgin Mary*. Religious paintings are meant to define religious figures in a deified manner. However, the artist exposed her breast which caused controversy during the British art exhibition. Much like the sculpture of Venus, this piece received a similar rating in its “suggestive” context, but also harsh criticism for disrespecting the sacred Mary, mother of Jesus. For this reason, the artist was looked at as discourteous. Though the artist later told the critics that he in no way meant to disgrace the Virgin Mary. His depiction was only intended to show his honor and respect for the iconic female based on his cultural background and personal vision of her. (Mack) Just because the artist’s depiction of Mary was not what we are accustomed to seeing, doesn’t mean that it is less beautiful.

The same could be said about Graffiti. Why should it be tolerated or regarded as “art” as well? It’s a criminal offense that’s been displayed on functioning storefronts or abandoned property. What most people don’t realize, however, is that there is much technique that goes into these paintings. Many of these artists use several layers. They start with a background color, they overlap with a border, add a fill, and an outline for their abstract letters. Some of these artists even incorporate color blending and 3-dimensional illusions. Not all graffiti is illegal. The technique has been featured on clothing, forms of advertisement, and even in schools. Though this urban work is usually seen in a negative light, there is much time, skill, and thought that goes into each masterpiece. Just because it isn’t the same style as artists from the past, who is to say that Claude Monet’s work is better?

As an artist myself, I have learned to have an appreciation for all types of artwork. Though I don’t love everything that I’ve laid eyes on in an art gallery or museum, I have had a new appreciation for different styles of art. From abstract work to more precise, realistic pieces, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Every artist is different, but that doesn’t make one person’s work any better than another’s. Whether it is shown in a gallery or viewed from a sidewalk, art is art. All art should be respected. I’ve learned to have an open mind concerning art and find the beauty in practically everything.

Annotated Bibliography

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Chris Oflili, *Holy Virgin Mary* (1995)

Over the centuries there have been several discrepancies on what true art is. In the articles, authors make it clear that art is created to send a message to people and challenge one’s personal views or beliefs. However, not everything that is displayed in the world of artistic expression is actually “art”. Beauty can be found in the simplest of things, it’s just about having an open mind and understanding what true art actually is.